United Nations A/60/559

General Assembly

Distr.: General
17 November 2005

Original: English

Sixtieth session
Agenda item 43
Culture of peace

Letter dated 16 November 2005 from the Permanent Representative of Belarus to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to bring to your attention the information note on the current situation regarding the Belarusian language in the Republic of Belarus prepared by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have this letter and its annex circulated as a document of the General Assembly under agenda item 43.

(*Signed*) Andrei **Dapkiunas**

05-60974 (E) 221105 231105

Annex to the letter dated 16 November 2005 from the Permanent Representative of Belarus to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

[Original: Russian]

Current situation regarding the Belarusian language in the Republic of Belarus

The historical development of the Belarusian language — the national language of the people of Belarus and the principal language of the Republic of Belarus — has been uneven, with periods when the language has flourished and others when it has fallen into decline. Nonetheless, it has always remained, and remains today, the most important element in the Belarusian national culture as the medium of communication and the symbol of national identity.

The Belarusian language became the State language of Belarus in the twenty-first century as a highly developed literary language that successfully fulfils all the requirements for communication in Belarusian society. The current status of the language and its use by the people of Belarus are largely defined by its development as one of two closely related languages, the other being Russian, which is also a State language of Belarus. The use of Belarusian is currently growing in various areas of the country's life, especially within the educational system, the sphere of culture, the media and others.

The Constitution of Belarus and the Act on Languages in the Republic of Belarus give citizens the right to choose their language of education and upbringing. In order to ensure the realization of this right, Belarus has institutions providing universal secondary education in either Belarusian and Russian, or a mixture of the two. At the present time, about 60 per cent of all institutions providing universal secondary education, out of a total of more than 4,000, use Belarusian as the language of instruction, while 33 per cent use Russian and some 7 per cent use both languages. Belarusian is used as the language of instruction in over 40 per cent of the country's preschool institutions. More than 75 per cent of all preschool institutions conduct their work entirely in Belarusian, grouping the children according to language, depending on the wishes of the parents.

Most of the general education schools currently using Belarusian as the language of instruction — more than 80 per cent of the total of Belarusian-speaking schools — are those in rural areas. At the same time, there has been a growing trend towards the use of Belarusian in urban areas since the turn of the century: since 2000, the total number of Belarusian-language schools in urban areas has doubled.

Whichever of the two State languages is used in a general education school, a number of subjects is taught only in Belarusian, including Belarusian history and geography. In addition, all those completing their basic education take a compulsory exam in Belarusian, while those finishing middle school can opt to take it in either of the State languages.

Either language may be chosen for instruction or upbringing in the case of children with physical or mental disabilities. The teaching of such children in special education schools takes place in Belarusian or Russian, according to parental

choice. Under the curriculum of these schools, an equal number of hours is allotted to teaching in the two State languages.

The Belarusian language occupies the same position in the country's higher education system. At the request of the students, higher educational establishments have set up courses, faculties and teaching groups in Belarusian. These operate in such major establishments as the Belarusian State University, the Belarusian State Economic University, the Minsk State Linguistic University and others. Over 300 students are currently taught in Belarusian at the Maxim Tank Belarusian State Pedagogical University. At the Belarusian State Economic University, 1,200 students are taught in Belarusian.

Belarusian is also more widely used in the cultural sphere. The country's State museums play a significant role in this process. Owing to their considerable numbers (133) and wide geographical distribution (about 60 sites), the State museums have an enormous impact on the popularization of the national language through excursions, scientific outreach activities and promotional literature. Thus, in its display, the State Museum of the History of Belarusian Literature sets the literary process in Belarus in a broad historical context, beginning with the first appearance of writing and going up to modern times. As a result of this work, a unique collection of manuscripts, rare books, photographs and archives of Belarusian writers has been assembled. This is of great importance for the preservation of the country's historical and cultural heritage.

The National Library of Belarus plays a significant role in extending the use of the Belarusian language. One of its priorities is to establish a comprehensive collection of national archives. The library's experts are preparing scientific, instructional, bibliographical and technical texts that will open up to the public the rich heritage left by Belarusian scientists, writers and artists, and also to introduce it to new Belarusian literature. At the beginning of 2005, the national archive fund, which is kept in the country's main library, contained over 450,000 items.

In order to extend the use of Belarusian and popularize the classics of Belarusian literature, in 2004 the National Library produced, jointly with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), a compact disc entitled "The literary heritage of Belarus, from the eleventh to the middle of the twentieth century", containing 1,400 literary works by 91 authors.

The country's film makers have embraced the use of the national language. The number of films made in Belarusian is growing steadily.

The Belarusian language is widely used in the mass media. The majority of periodicals receiving State subsidies currently appear in Belarusian. Such publications include newspapers and journals focusing on social and political, literary and artistic, scientific and technical or cultural topics, as well as publications aimed at young people and children.

The Belarusian language is used on television and radio. Broadcasting in the national language currently makes up 80 per cent of output on the First National Channel of Belarusian radio, the Culture television channel and Stolitsa (Capital) radio. Programmes in Belarusian feature largely on the country's main television channels. Many programmes, including historical and cultural programmes, children's programmes and the news, among others, are broadcast in Belarusian. A

number of French television programmes are also shown in Belarusian, mainly feature films and documentaries.

The use of Belarusian is spreading and the language is now operational throughout the country. Every citizen of Belarus receives information in Belarusian on a daily basis.

The Belarusian language is one of the most important elements of national identity: according to the latest census, which took place in 1999, over 85 per cent of people claimed that Belarusian was their native language. This is clear evidence of their identification with Belarus, its culture and its history.